

# Evaluation literature informing the AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework

Companion document to the AES First Nations  
Cultural Safety Framework



Kathleen Stacey and Sharon Gollan



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### About the authors

Sharon Gollan is a descendent of the Ngarrindjeri nation of South Australia, with family and cultural connections to many communities within and beyond South Australia. Sharon is well known for and under constant demand to facilitate 'Cultural Respect and Safety' training workshops, having done this since 1994. Kathleen Stacey is a white Australian who has co-facilitated 'Cultural Respect and Safety' training in university and a broad range of organisational contexts with Sharon for over 20 years. Since 1999, Sharon and Kathleen have regularly worked in partnership to design and implement evaluation, strategic planning, program planning, policy development, community consultation, curriculum development, education/training, and social-emotional wellbeing projects, predominantly in health, education and human services sectors.

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**Jasmine Miikika Craciun**, a proud Barkindji, Malyangapa woman, is the artist who did the artwork on the © beyond...(Kathleen Stacey & Associates) and Sharon Gollan & Associate diagrams. Jasmine also developed the artwork for the diagrams that Kathleen and Sharon created specifically for the Framework.

### Use of language for cultural identity

'Australian First Nations people' is the language used to represent and be inclusive of people from a diversity of Aboriginal nations and Torres Strait Islander nations in Australia. This decision was made by the Australian First Nations members of the Cultural Safety Framework Reference Group. Other language may be interchanged on occasions, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or Indigenous peoples. This usually occurs when referring to other documents or contexts in which these are the preferred terms or quoting from other documents.

Non-Indigenous people is the language used to represent and be inclusive of Australians who are not First Nations people.



### Cover artwork

© Daniel (Palawa) 'In Touch' 2020, acrylic on canvas

'Being in touch with myself  
and my community.'

This artwork was created through The Torch, a not for profit organisation, that provides art, cultural and arts industry support to Indigenous offenders and ex-offenders in Victoria. [www.thetorch.org.au](http://www.thetorch.org.au)

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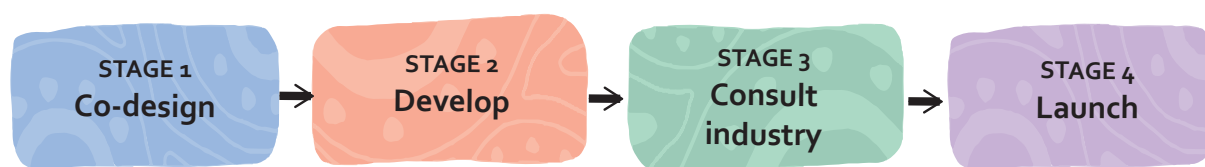
# Introduction

In July 2020, the Australian Evaluation Society (AES) commissioned Sharon Gollan and Kathleen Stacey to develop what became the AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework. Sharon and Kathleen worked with a Project Reference Group consisting of First Nations and non-Indigenous AES members drawn from both the AES Board and each Strategic Advisory Committee.

Over the August 2020 to September 2021 period, the project moved through the four stages shown in Figure 1.

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**FIGURE 1: FOUR STAGES OF THE PROJECT**



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During ‘Stage 1: Co-design’, a background paper was written as a foundation for the co-design work between the authors and the Project Reference Group, which presented the outcomes of:

- a review of the evaluation literature for documents related to culturally safe, culturally competent, and/or culturally appropriate approaches to evaluation practice
- a review of the purpose, scope, structure and content of national frameworks relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across health, education, research or evaluation fields that made references to culturally safe, culturally competent, and/or culturally appropriate practices.

This companion document describes the outcomes from the review of the evaluation literature, which represents the literature available **as of October 2020**. We note that some further relevant papers may have been published since this time that are not included in the companion document.

A description of cultural safety and why the term was chosen in preference to other terms, such as cultural competence is explained in the section on ‘Cultural safety’ in the AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework (Gollan & Stacey 2021).

# Approach to the literature review

The following search phrases were used to identify available and potentially relevant documents in the evaluation literature:

- 'cultural safety' and 'evaluation'
- 'culturally safe evaluation'
- 'cultural competence' and 'evaluation'
- 'culturally competent evaluation'.

The criteria for determining inclusion in the review was whether the document could inform the purpose, scope, structure and/or content of the AES Framework.

Documents were not included if they focused on any of the following four matters:

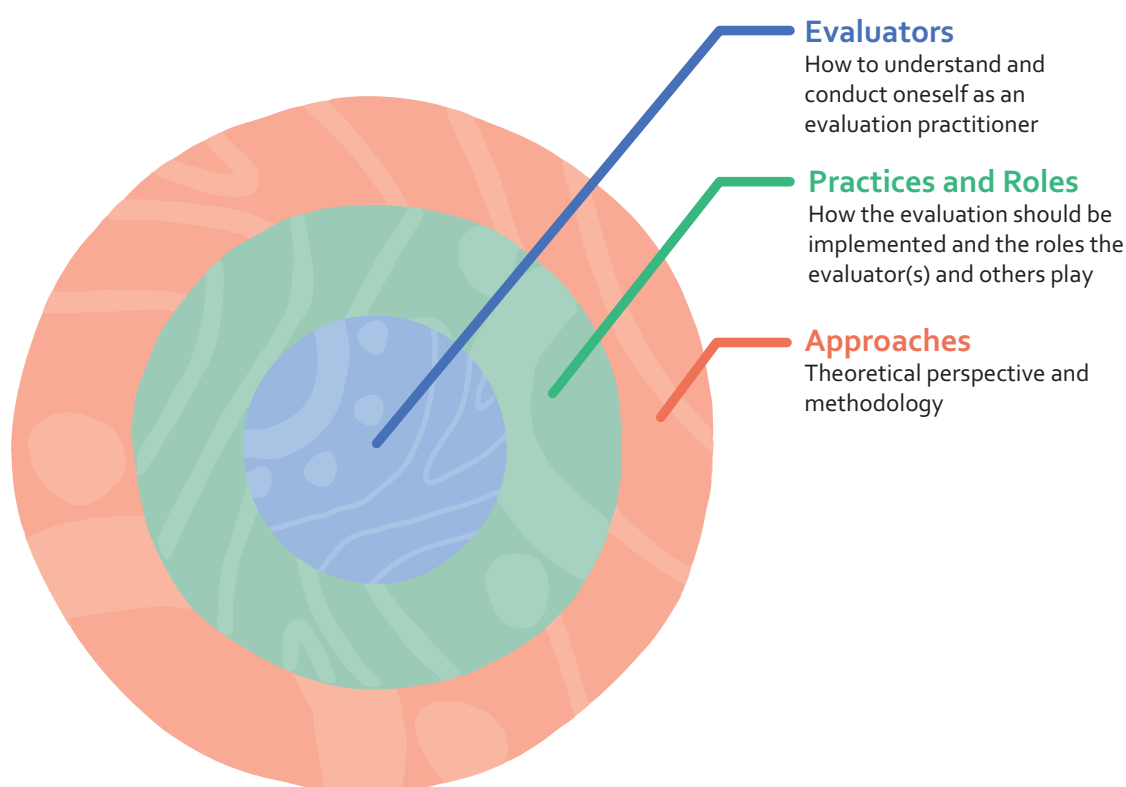
- assessing the cultural safety or cultural competence of programs or services
- evaluating cultural safety or cultural competence training
- discussing cultural safety or cultural competence in relation to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, as this phrase does not relate to or include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- addressing cultural competence in the USA context as it is always used in relation to culturally and linguistically diverse communities; some documents from Canadian and Aotearoa/New Zealand contexts are included because they were First Nations focused.



# Learnings from the evaluation literature

Thirty-six papers were identified that spoke directly or indirectly to culturally safe evaluation practice. 'Indirect' means the terms cultural safety or culturally safe were not always used with other terms such as culturally competent and/or culturally appropriate being used. These papers were almost always focused in one or more of the three ways depicted in Figure 2.

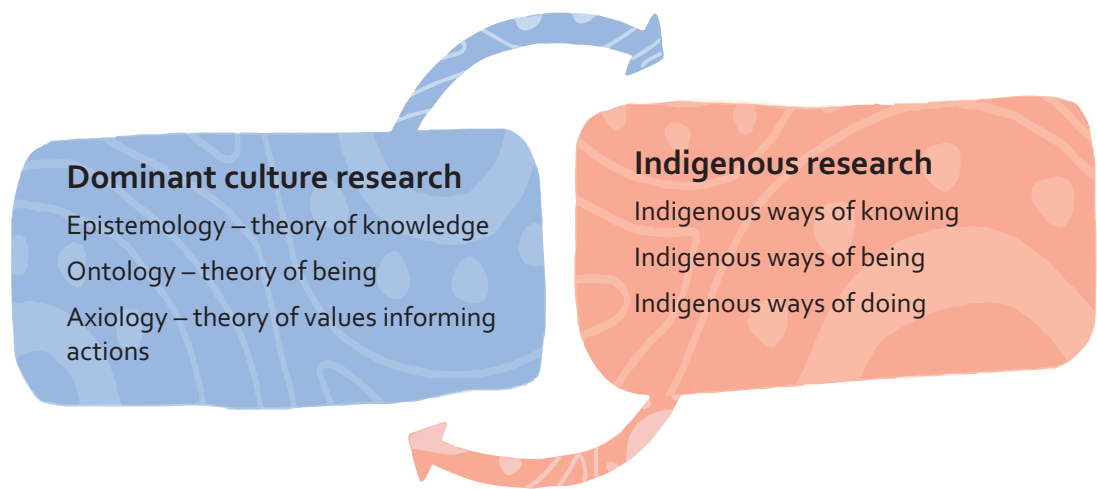
**FIGURE 2: THREE FOCUS AREAS IN LITERATURE ON CULTURAL SAFETY EVALUATION**



Over the past two decades Australian First Nations academics, researchers and evaluators have explored a culturally centred approach to research and evaluation (Dudgeon, Bray Darlaston-Jones & Walker 2020; Martin & Mirrabooa 2003; Rigney 1999, 2001). This has led to an increasing use of the term 'Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing' within policy, practice, scholarship, research and evaluation. The research and evaluation literature refers to 'Indigenist research', 'Indigenous methodologies' and 'Indigenous Standpoint Theory' (e.g. Cargo et al. 2019; Dudgeon et al. 2020; Martin & Mirrabooa 2003; Rigney 1991, 2001; Rogers & Radcliffe et al. 2018; Whaitau & Ockerby 2019; Williams 2018).

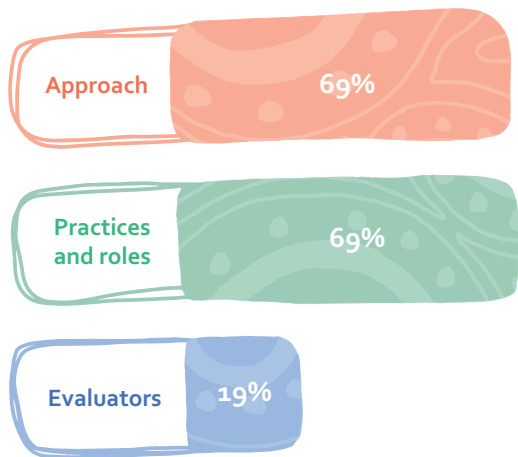
The equivalent language for Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in Western knowledge systems and the dominant culture in Australia is epistemology, ontology and axiology (Walter 2013). This is illustrated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: EQUIVALENT LANGUAGE IN WESTERN AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS



If this is applied to the three focus areas in the literature on cultural safety in evaluation, then:

- ‘evaluation approaches’ reflect ‘ways of knowing’
- ‘evaluation practices and roles’ reflect ‘ways of doing’
- ‘evaluators’ reflect ‘ways of being’.



For the 36 documents identified during the review, well over two thirds included a focus on ‘evaluation approaches’ and ‘evaluation practices and roles’.

Only 19% focused on ‘evaluators’ – specifically, how to understand and conduct oneself as an evaluation practitioner in Australian First Nations contexts. The key learnings from the literature review are shared in this section based on these three focus areas.

Almost all literature was from the last decade, reflecting contemporary understandings and practices amongst evaluators in Australia. Most literature focused on how evaluators plan, undertake and report on evaluations, although a few papers also commented on or specifically addressed evaluation commissioning and the contribution of evaluation to policy that impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

When Russell Taylor addressed the 2003 Australasian Evaluation Society Conference, the first Aboriginal Australian to be invited to give a plenary at the AES Conference, he made this request of the evaluation profession in relation to the implementation of ethical principles in evaluation involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

If my address today contains any significant message, it is this: that the evaluation profession itself needs to move beyond rhetoric to reality in its practice. In so saying, I mean that the issues highlighted by me in this paper may not be new concepts to many (or indeed the majority) of people attending this conference – and these principles have been expounded and advocated long and hard by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike over recent years – and I am also aware elements have been explored in previous AES conferences to varying degrees. However, the profession needs to realistically evaluate itself in an effort to determine whether or not these principles are truly being embraced in actual practice. From my own personal and professional perspective, there remains considerable work to be done. (Taylor 2003, p. 43)

The literature review can be considered a partial response to Taylor's request. The Framework offers the evaluation profession in Australia guidance to embrace the principles to which he refers and translate them into action so, collectively, we undertake the work that Taylor believed was required.

## Focus on evaluation approaches

The predominant types of evaluation approaches advocated in the literature were a range of collaborative and participatory approaches. Collaborative and participatory approaches that commit to shared ownership of the evaluation focus, process, analysis, reporting and utilisation of the findings in policy, program and practice were considered more responsive and respectful of culture, with a stronger chance of being experienced as culturally safe (Blanchet-Cohen, Geoffroy & Hoyos 2018; Blignaut, Haswell & Jackson-Pulver 2016; Blignaut & Williams 2017; Cargo et al. 2019; CBPATISIP no date; Chouinard & Cousins 2007; Curran & Taylor-Barnett 2019; Dart 2018; Dudgeon et al. 2020; Gollan & Stacey 2018b; Grey & Putt et al. 2016; Grey & Yamaguchi et al. 2018; Haviland & Pillsbury 2012; Holder & Putt 2018; McKendrick et al. 2013; Mia et al. 2017; Muir & Dean 2017; Rogers & Bower et al. 2017; Rogers & Harrison et al. 2018; Rogers & Radcliffe et al. 2018; Rossingh & Yunupingu 2016; Sutton et al. 2016; Taylor 2003; Whitau & Ockerby 2019; Williams 2018).

Dudgeon et al. 2020 noted that the emergence of collaborative and participatory approaches in research and evaluation, such as participatory action research (PAR), was led by First Nations peoples, and both informed and well preceded global statements such as the Declaration of Alma-Ata 1978 that applied this approach to the health context, particularly primary health care. A core example in Australia is the establishment of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector, starting with the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service in 1971. For example:

The Indigenous foundations of PAR are frequently erased in the literature in the field. Indeed, both PAR and the principles of holistic participatory community development which underpin the primary health care movement have occluded Indigenous origins. (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p. 1).

The leadership of First Nations peoples was not often acknowledged in papers that describe evaluation undertaken through collaborative and participatory approaches. In contrast, it was more common for these practices to be described in the evaluation literature as more conducive to good practice and higher cultural acceptability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluation contexts.



As argued recently by Dudgeon et al. (2020), and previously by Chouinard and Cousins (2007) in a Canadian context, adopting a Western-based constructivist, collaborative and participatory theoretical perspective and/or methodology is not full proof in resulting in a culturally safe and respectful experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in whatever role they play in the evaluation process – from members of the evaluation team through to participants.

Chouinard and Cousins (2007) spoke directly to the problematic nature of unacknowledged power and privilege when applying collaborative and participatory approaches:

Moreover, the use of a participatory or collaborative approach, while necessary in cross-cultural settings, should not obscure a more thorough analysis of power and politics within an evaluation context, as power differentials often persist despite the use of more inclusive approaches. (p. 51)

We need to articulate power differentials epistemologically and methodologically, recognizing that despite the collaborative methodologies and the methods we enact in good faith, we are not merely different but unequal, with power continuing to favour the dominant, and more privileged social class. As such, we need to engage in a more substantive discussion about power and politics in cross-cultural evaluation using participatory methods, particularly in communities with a continuing history of exploitation. (p. 52)

More recently, papers and documents are emerging that advocate for and/or outline evaluation approaches and practices based on Indigenous Standpoint Theory and ‘Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing’ (for example: Cargo et al. 2019; Dudgeon et al. 2020; Rogers & Radcliffe et al. 2018; Whitau & Ockerby 2019; Williams 2018). As noted above, in Western research and evaluation terms, this equates with epistemology, ontology and axiology (Walter 2013). It appears there has been more than a decade of lag time between Russell Taylor’s statements to the 2003 AES profession about elevating and honouring Indigenous knowledges, and this being practiced and written about with greater conviction in the profession.

I am not advocating that Indigenous knowledge should replace non-Indigenous or ‘Western’ knowledge but rather that it should be afforded a ‘parity of esteem’ with other knowledge at all times and, that in some situations, it should be given primacy. I believe that Indigenous knowledge now has its own ‘space’ which is neither a primitivist ‘traditionalist’ view nor a largely Western one – but rather has its own identities giving rise to a variety of new and strategic ways to interact with and create more even power relations in a postcolonial world. (Taylor 2003, p. 50)

## Focus on specific evaluation practices and roles

A selection of the literature went beyond a description of the evaluation approach to give more detail and/or direction about the types of evaluation practices that supported culturally safe evaluation (Blanchet-Cohen, Geoffroy & Hoyos 2018; Blignaut & Williams 2017; Cargo et al. 2019; CBPATSISP no date; Curran & Taylor-Barnett 2019; Dart 2018; Gollan & Stacey 2018b; Grey & Yamaguchi et al. 2018; Haviland & Pillsbury 2012; Holder & Putt 2018; Kelaher et al. 2018; Markiewicz 2012; McCausland 2019; Muir & Dean 2017; Price, McCoy & Mafi 2012; Rogers & Bower et al. 2017; Rogers & Harrison et al. 2018; Rogers & Radcliffe et al. 2018; Rossingh & Yunupingu 2016; Sutton et al. 2016; Taylor 2003; Whitau & Ockerby 2019).

This included the roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as evaluation team members, or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that may be brought in to support and/or expand the evaluation team, such as engaging and/or training and mentoring local community-

based evaluators/researchers and cultural brokers/advisors (Grey & Yamaguchi et al. 2018; Haviland & Pilsbury 2012; Holder & Putt 2018; Price, McCoy & Mafi 2012; Rogers & Harrison et al. 2018; Sutton et al. 2016; Taylor 2003).

In describing how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health evaluation should occur, Kelaheer et al. (2018) identified the following as practices for which evaluators need to take responsibility:

- Establish evaluation governance, engaging with program governance and enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership (this may occur at multiple levels for some programs)
- Establish processes (e.g. MoUs) to ensure evaluation's accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including issues of data sovereignty
- Develop knowledge translation/dissemination plan
- Refine program logic and develop evaluation measures to reflect shared agenda
- Create opportunities for ongoing mutual knowledge exchange
- Minimise load/replication of data collection from program implementers/ACCOS/ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- Build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluation capacity through training and employment over the long term
- Strengthen information systems to provide information on program evaluation
- Build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity to support information systems through training and employment over the long term
- Create opportunities for ongoing mutual knowledge exchange. (p. 53)

Kelaheer et al. (2018) also identified a role in knowledge translation, which was to 'ensure evaluation accountability processes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are implemented' (p. 53). In short, to advocate and/or assist in having discussions with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities involved about how the evaluation findings should be applied to achieve positive and wanted change. Further, they identified what was required of evaluation commissioners and program implementers to achieve high quality and culturally safe evaluation that is beneficial to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A few papers outlined the development and/or application of a cultural or ethical protocol for undertaking evaluations in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts (Bower et al. 2015; Gibb et al. 2019a, 2019b; Rogers & Bower et al. 2017). The Fred Hollows Foundation outlined the purpose of their cultural protocol as:

... to provide guidance for staff and evaluators in order to ensure that evaluation-related activities are undertaken with the appropriate respect for, and participation of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. (Rogers & Bower et al. 2017, p. 13)

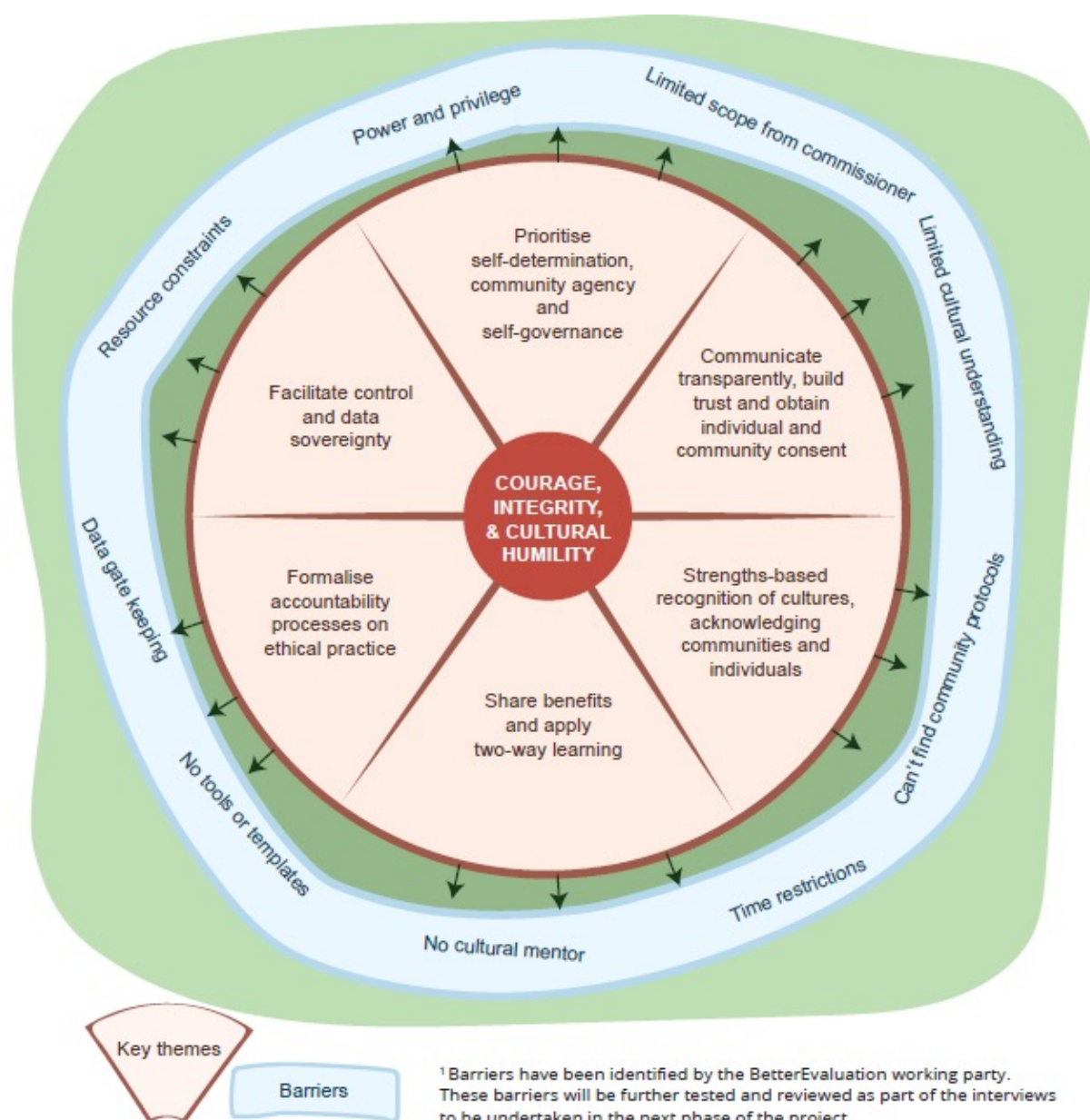
The purpose of the BetterEvaluation ethical protocol (Gibb et al. 2019b), described as a companion document to the Australian Evaluation Society Code of Ethics (AES, 2013), is:

To promote the full implementation of ethical principles when engaging in monitoring and evaluation activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the aim to support M&E practices that respect the rights of, and function for the benefit of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Gibb et al. 2019b, p. 2)

The protocol is based on six equally important themes, each with one or more principles – see the inner ring in Figure 4 below (Gibb et al. 2019b, p. 6). In the outer ring, it acknowledges a range of barriers to ethical practice. The types of evaluation practices associated with each principle for each theme is detailed in the document.

BetterEvaluation also developed a Code of Conduct (Gibb et al. 2019a), which is specific to how information about evaluation activity by or with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations is presented and shared on their website.

**FIGURE 4: THE BETTEREVALUATION ETHICAL PROTOCOL THEMES AND BARRIERS TO ETHICAL PRACTICE**





## Focus on evaluators

In his 2003 AES Conference plenary address, Russell Taylor asked the evaluation profession: 'How well are AES members advised and prepared with respect to their capacity to carry out **effective** and **ethical** evaluation practices in **inter-cultural** settings?' (p. 49, original emphasis). His paper asked evaluators to consider how they approached their work 'before', 'during' and 'after' an evaluation in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are involved.

In papers published since, there was evidence of greater attention to these three stages. However, there was limited focus on how to understand and conduct oneself as a non-Indigenous evaluator on an **ongoing** basis. This means appreciating how our cultural identity and social positioning within the wider Australian historical context plays a role in shaping how we approach and undertake an evaluation as non-Indigenous evaluators, and how we are experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in the evaluation, whether as colleagues, organisations, communities or participants.

The Fred Hollows Foundation cultural protocol had a small section on 'cultural humility', meaning:

... self-reflection and careful consideration regarding your own assumptions and beliefs. It means maintaining a willingness to suspend judgement about a person or group based on generalisations you might make about their culture. Cultural humility is an important step in helping to redress the imbalance of power inherent in relationships between practitioners and those that they serve and collaborate with on shared activities ... Being culturally humble does not mean giving up one's values, but deepening an understanding of these values and those of others, and thus navigating cultural differences in ways which reduce the negative aspects of power imbalance. (Bower et al. 2015, p. 9)

Pakeha colleagues in Aotearoa/New Zealand recently advocated for 'reflexivity', as evaluators need to understand who they are as part of the dominant culture in that country, engage with historical and contemporary truth, understand power and manage personal discomfort in this process:

We suggest that, in working in the cultural space, tools to enhance and encourage evaluator reflexivity may be crucial for developing cultural competence, and such tools may help hone a critical edge for evaluators as instruments in credible and competent practice. (Torrie et al. 2015, p. 50)

In a recent paper examining strategies that support culturally safe evaluation in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, Cargo et al. (2019) stated that:

Culturally safe evaluations meet and address the needs of Indigenous people, organisations and communities from an Indigenous cultural worldview or standpoint. They require evaluation stakeholders to be self-aware of their cultural biases and assumptions, and the power they exercise in their relationships with Indigenous people, organisations and communities in all aspects of the evaluation process. (p. 2)

They went on to share how striving towards cultural safety requires:

... non-Indigenous parties to learn about Indigenous beliefs and values and, through critical self-reflection, identify the personal biases and White privilege that they bring to their evaluation practice. Becoming culturally safe is a process of understanding and transformation that can occur at individual (e.g. individual evaluator) and collective levels (e.g. health agency). The evaluation of Indigenous health and wellbeing programs must privilege equity in power relationships. (p. 2)

Their study identified the **importance** and **achievability** of concepts and practices that would contribute to culturally safe evaluation. Twelve concept clusters, each with three or more associated practices, were identified in the Australian context. Of these clusters, 'Evaluator Integrity' and 'Cultural Capability' were considered the 2nd and 4th most **important**, respectively, with 'Aboriginal Voice' the most important. In terms of **achievability**, 'Evaluator Integrity' and 'Cultural Capability' were considered the 1st and 4th most achievable respectively (see Figure 3 in Cargo et al. 2019, p. 11).

'Evaluator Integrity' and 'Cultural Capability' were the two clusters that focused on how evaluators understand and conduct themselves and have direct relevance to the AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework. In fact, Cargo et al. (2019) suggested that 'addressing evaluator characteristics represents "low-hanging fruit" for professional associations and health agencies to action in the short-term' (p. 16).

From our own practice (Gollan & Stacey 2018b), we know that a clear understanding of power and privilege combined with an accurate knowledge of history and how it then applies in evaluation and research contexts are required capabilities for evaluators to facilitate culturally safe evaluations. This is achieved through non-Indigenous people, as evaluators and researchers, undertaking a process of critical self-reflection – also referred to as decolonisation (Dudgeon et al. 2020; Gollan & Stacey 2018a).

Dudgeon et al. (2020) explained that:

For non-Indigenous peoples, decolonisation requires the same understanding of the historical truths but also the unpacking and recognition of the unearned power and privilege associated with the legacy of the coloniser (Darlaston-Jones 2015, 2016; Walker et al. 2014). In order for non-Indigenous practitioners and researchers to decolonise their practice and minimise potential for harm, it is necessary to recognise that they are embedded in the 'Whiteness' which has simultaneously privileged non-Indigenous people and adversely impacted the lives and experiences of Indigenous Australians since colonisation (Moreton-Robinson 2009). (p. 12)

In a plenary delivered to the 2018 AES Conference (Gollan & Stacey 2018b), we addressed the topic of cultural accountability in evaluating Aboriginal initiatives and programs, suggesting there are questions that non-Aboriginal evaluators need to answer:

In our experience, evaluators working in an Aboriginal context will often talk about a commitment to do this in a culturally respectful way ...

How do we apply the theory of this to our practice? How do non-Aboriginal evaluators respond to being challenged by Aboriginal people to operate in a different manner than is usual and assumed for them? This challenge may come from Aboriginal people who are evaluation team members, commissioners of the evaluation, or staff in the program or area being evaluated ...

Have non-Aboriginal and white evaluators reflected on their skills and abilities to work in a cultural context other than their own, i.e. dominant culture? (Slides 1 and 2)

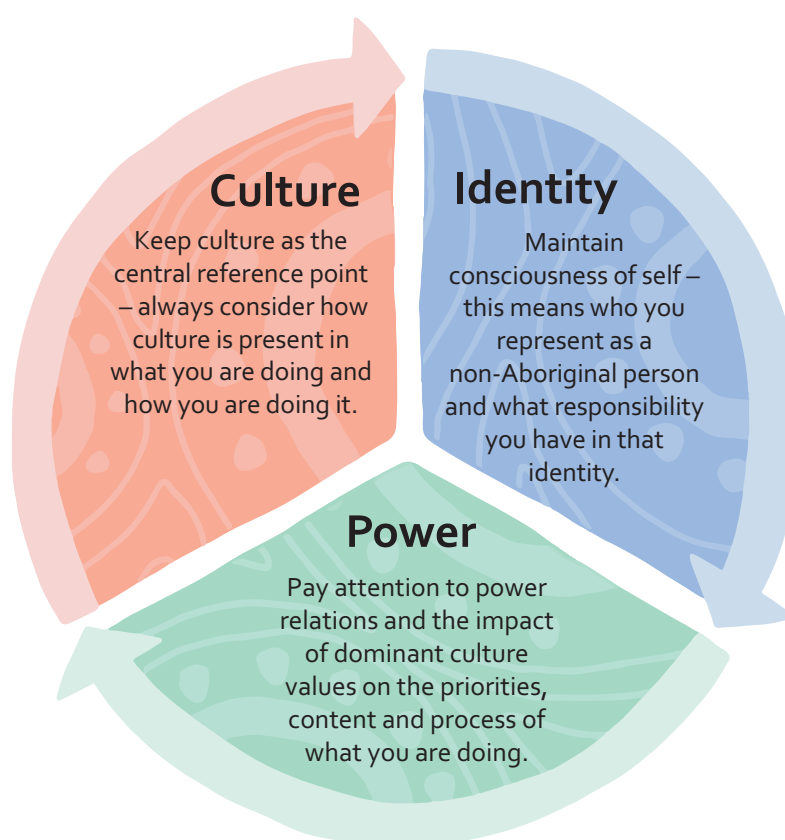
We explored whether and how **culture**, **power** and **identity** were considered during key components of the evaluation process:

- the decision to evaluate
- the evaluation process
- the role of individual evaluators, i.e. how we understand and conduct ourselves as evaluation practitioners.

This has been further articulated in greater detail in the AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework (Gollan & Stacey 2021), which explains more about the proposed requirements for retaining a consistent focus on culture, power and identity – see Figure 5.

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**FIGURE 5: THREE ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL ACCOUNTABILITY**



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## A final note on language

The terms 'issues' and 'challenges' were frequently used in the titles and/or abstracts of papers and documents on evaluation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. While unintended, this language inadvertently supports the deficit discourse that is regularly used in policy, program and practice arenas when talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Fogarty & Bulloch et al. 2018; Fogarty & Lovell et al. 2018).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples certainly face challenges in their lives that are not experienced by other Australians, especially white Australians, such as racism. This results in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians experiencing issues that should not be present as they go about their daily lives.

During a Canberra-based roundtable in 2012 on Better Indigenous policies: the role of evaluation, Les Malezer (2013) reframed this language as challenges and issues that non-Indigenous evaluators and government need to address in working towards 'self-determination and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and understanding 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' aspirations' and how that is reflected in policy, programs and practice. This orientation is like that posed by Gollan & Stacey (2018b) regarding the responsibility of non-Indigenous people to prevent and address racism in any context.

If non-Indigenous evaluators increase their capacity to operate in culturally safe ways, they reduce the likelihood that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will experience challenges and issues with them when undertaking evaluation together. This requires non-Indigenous evaluators to make a shift to more strength-based and accountable language such as the following.

- What 'considerations' do we need to have about our personal conduct, role, practice and approach as an evaluator?
- How do we critically reflect on our cultural identity and social positioning, and how this may impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in the evaluation, whether as colleagues, organisations, communities or participants?
- How do we recognise, value and support the knowledges and skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in the evaluation?
- How do we work in flexible and agile ways to align our practice with cultural protocols and practices that are meaningful and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in the evaluation?
- What is our preparedness to utilise or develop different ways of operating that require us to put aside familiar assumptions and may take us out of our comfort zone?
- What is required of us to create culturally safe evaluation practices and spaces as we work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, organisations, communities and/or participants?

All of these matters are explored in more detail in the AES First Nations Cultural Safety Framework (Gollan & Stacey 2021).

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